

~THE COUNTIES~

ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COUNTIES
MAGAZINE
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BATTLE ABBEY AND SENLAC HILL, SUSSEX

GOVERNMENT STATEMENT 1974:

"THE NEW COUNTY BOUNDARIES ARE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE AREAS AND
WILL NOT ALTER THE TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES OF COUNTIES, NOR IS IT
INTENDED THAT THE LOYALTIES OR PEOPLE LIVING IN THEM WILL CHANGE."

The Association of British Counties

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Submissions welcome.

Editorial

I would like to thank you for all your kind and helpful comments about my first attempt at editing the ABC magazine. It is a tremendously enjoyable experience and it's pleasing to know that I am doing something to help the cause, as it were. There was a query about the answer to the quiz question about coastlines which may have been in error and if it was, then I apologise. I may have missed out a small part of Westmorland coastline in my reckoning.

One thing that struck me from reading the correspondence is that although we all have a fairly united front where traditional counties are concerned we are a diverse group of people. Two members inquired as to my use of the letters CE and BCE when dating. These letters stand for "Common Era" and "Before Common Era" and are often used by non-Christian people who do not want to use AD and BC. No offense is meant by their use and none should be taken. I'm sure even our political beliefs range along the spectrum and we even argue over the counties we are trying to preserve! Anyone who has been to the meetings will know what I mean.

I'm sure that I wasn't the only one who was pleased to see Russell Grant on Mastermind with "The County of Middlesex" as his specialist subject. What a great way to advertise our counties and on the BBC no less! On a similar note, I was watching the Welsh comedian Rhod Gilbert's DVD the other day and was amused to hear him actually talk about "Montgomeryshire". His bit about the changing "counties" of Wales was very funny but unfortunately too true.

I was also listening to the cricket on Five Live Sports Extra when I heard it mentioned via a listener's email that Middlesbrough is located in the North Riding of Yorkshire. At last! If any town suffers from an identity crisis it is certainly Middlesbrough. It doesn't even seem to appear on many road signs which I'm sure has mystified anyone driving into the northeast of England.

Like me if you are a member of the National Trust or English Heritage you will have received your guidebooks for 2010-2011. And like me you are probably frustrated by their complete lack of regard for our counties. From organisations that are supposed to conserve and maintain our national heritage they are certainly picking and choosing their projects. I have to wonder what their motivation is. I have a sense that money is behind it somewhere but isn't it always? I know members have written to them to argue our point but these organisations don't seem to want to listen. I guess we will all just have to make our own corrections!

You will read later about two men who travelled to all the counties during the course of a fortnight. I am trying to do this myself although it has taken me a lot, lot longer than two weeks! I can claim to have visited all the counties in Wales and Northern Ireland, 38 in England and 20 Scottish counties. I recently did a day out in Scotland when I visited three different (new) shires. I was surprised but delighted to see a sign for Clackmannanshire in its lovely setting which you can see here.

There are several Fife signs just past this on the next roundabout. The Scots (for whatever reason-political, patriotic or perhaps another motivation) have embraced their traditional counties in

a way we can only hope that England and Wales someday will. But although I've seen signs for Nairnshire, Clackmannanshire and Banffshire there still remain some of those annoying signs proclaiming "Dumfries & Galloway" or "North Lanarkshire". Likewise, the Scottish tourist board doesn't seem to have picked up on this either as most of their brochures still bear unmentionable names. ABC may have to help them to sort that out.



News from the Committee

Peter Boyce, Chairman

Friends of Real Lancashire played hosts to the ABC Committee for our meeting on Saturday 7th November at The Junction in Rainford. As always, there was a lengthy agenda. Details are presented below, updated to take account of the many developments since the meeting. The Committee will meet again in July 2010. The Association will hold its Triennial General Meeting in autumn 2010. A guest speaker and a venue are currently being arranged. All members will be sent details later in the summer.

The Counties

The Committee thanked Mari Foster for the production of her first issue of *The Counties*. All members are encouraged to write and submit articles to Mari for future issues. Please email her at thecounties@yahoo.co.uk.

Border Signs

ABC and its member organisations continue to make progress on border sign issues.

Saddleworth White Rose Society are set to unveil the first of their Yorkshire/Lancashire border signs on Saturday 24th April at 12 noon. This will be at Grains Bar where the A672 (Halifax/Oldham Road) crosses the B6197 (Shaw/Delph Road). Further signs will follow.

Martin Phillips, our traffic signs officer, reported to the Committee that Trafford Council had erected Lancashire/Cheshire border signs on the A56 where it crosses the Mersey. Martin had also been in contact with the Highways Agency concerning the removal of the motorway boundary signs for those county councils which have recently been replaced by Unitary Authorities. HA have said they will remove the signs for Cheshire (M53 and M6) and County Durham (A1M and A66).

Over the last few years, ABC has systematically managed to get most of the boundary signs relating to the "metropolitan counties" removed. Since the meeting Martin has got the Highways Agency to agree to remove the last remaining "West Midlands" sign on the M6, a red letter day for the Chairman (a Coventrian). If any members know of any remaining metropolitan county signs, on

any road, please let Martin know (martin.philips07@btinternet.com). It is usually fairly straightforward to get these removed, given enough nagging.

The Committee also decided that now was the right time to begin lobbying to have traditional counties signed on the motorway network, via the amendment of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions to include a specific sign for this purpose, possibly a brown tourist sign. It was also suggested that Friends of Real Lancashire could make applications to the Highways Agency to site brown tourist signs on Lancashire borders on the M6. This, at least, would enable us to ascertain the arguments and objections that the Highways Agency could make against such signs.

Local authority survey

Martin Phillips reported to the committee on his continuing survey of local authority attitudes to the counties. He has completed local authorities in Lancashire and north and mid Wales. Most local authorities have expressed generally positive attitudes to the historic counties, major exceptions being Durham County Council and Wrexham County Borough Council. The results of the project, as it relates to Lancashire, will be presented on the FORL website. Martin then intends to complete the survey of Wales and northern England.

POSTCOMM review of Postcode Address File Code of Practice

Change may be on the way in the field of county names in postal addresses. Since the introduction of "flexible addressing" in the mid-1990s, county names have been optional in all UK addresses. If a county name is used, the user can choose to include one of three types of county: the traditional county; the former postal county (i.e. the postal counties as used 1974-1994); or the administrative county. Currently Royal Mail provides all three types of county data in the "Alias File" it supplies to go within its main postal address database, the Postcode Address File (PAF). The producers of address management software take widely differing approaches to the provision of county data within their products. The market leader (QAS) just supplies the former postal county data (Avon, Cleveland, Clwyd, Humberside et al.). Others allow the user to choose which type of county data they want. Most do, however, get their county data from the Royal Mail's Alias File.

Now POSTCOMM, the postal service regulator, is undertaking a review of the Postcode Address File (PAF) Code of Practice. According to the terms of the

review, Royal Mail *"wants to gain an understanding from a wide audience of users, as to their issues or concerns, should only one form of County details be supplied in the future. Royal Mail advises that the Administrative County is the only one that can be maintained since it is the only one open to ongoing change."*

ABC has submitted its views to POSTCOMM re: county data. There are that:

- the traditional county data should be retained within PAF Alias File
- the former postal county data should either be removed from the PAF Alias File or amended to reflect the former postal counties pre-1974
- administrative county data is totally unsuitable for postal address purposes and should be removed from the PAF Alias File.

The deadline for submissions was 31st July 2009. There is still no indication as to when the review's recommendations will be published.

Whilst it is hard to guess what the outcome of this review might be, the complete removal of county data from the PAF Alias File might actually advance ABC's aims, since it would leave a gap in the market to supply county data which ABC can fill. ABC has recently been contacted by *CraftyPostcode* (an online address management software provider) who had been made aware of ABC's Be Properly Addressed facility by their account manager at Royal Mail and are contemplating using our database to add traditional county data to their PAF derived database. We have credibility in this area since we have been supplying Royal mail with their traditional county data for the last ten years.

Local Government reviews in 'Suffolk', 'Norfolk' and 'Devon'

On 8th December 2009, the Boundary Committee for England finally submitted its recommendations to the Secretary of State on unitary local government in the administrative counties of "Devon", "Norfolk" and "Suffolk". The Secretary of State then announced his decisions on 9th February 2010. Despite the lengthy and costly review process, in the end the Government completely threw out all of the Boundary Committees suggestions and imposed its own:

- As regards "Norfolk", Norwich City Council will become a unitary authority. In the rest of the administrative county, the existing two-tier structure will remain, as will Norfolk County Council.
- As regards "Devon", Exeter City Council will become a unitary authority. In the rest of the administrative county, the existing two-tier structure will remain, as will Devon County Council.

- As regards "Suffolk", the whole process has been kicked into the long grass for the foreseeable future.

Overall this outcome is mildly to the good as far as ABC is concerned. One of our key aims is to see a clear distinction drawn in the public mind between local government and the historic counties. The continued creeping growth of unitary local government certainly helps this. It also has the great advantage of making local government an even less suitable basis for general purpose geography.

Wikipedia

Concern has been expressed by many ABC members about Wikipedia's treatment of the historic counties. Current Wikipedia policy in this area is contained in its Naming Conventions (UK Counties) guidelines:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Naming_conventions_\(UK_counties\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Naming_conventions_(UK_counties))

These were drawn up by the UK Geography WikiProject team and followed a "long and acrimonious discussion" on the issue within the Wikipedia community.

Wikipedia's approach is essentially to refer to the location of places via the "current, administrative county". If a place is a unitary authority, the ceremonial county can be used as a geographic reference. The intention is that historic counties should be used in articles about places and in references to places only in an historic context, and then only as an after-note.

This policy is, of course, fundamentally flawed and many in the Wikipedia community are far from happy with it (hence the acrimony). The obvious solution would be to treat the historic counties as completely distinct entities to modern administrative areas. Places could then be referred to by reference to both their administrative set-up and their historic county. This would be far less confusing and would actually reflect the legal reality of the status of administrative areas. This is how Britannica does things. On a positive note, the Wikipedia policy does at least use the terms 'administrative county', 'unitary authority' and 'ceremonial county', in theory making the differing administrative natures of these areas clearer.

The policy also does allow historic counties to be referred to in various ways. The following are quoted as "acceptable":

- Coventry is in the West Midlands, and within the historic borders of Warwickshire

- Middlesex is a historic county of England, now mostly covered by Greater London
- Southwark is a village in the London Borough of Southwark in Greater London. It is in the ancient borders of Surrey.

One can actually describe anywhere in the UK in these terms and be within the agreed Wikipedia policy. Whilst not an ideal form of wording, this approach certainly makes clear which historic county a place is in. The following example about the Yorkshire Dales National Park shows how such wording can be used:

"The area lies within the historic county boundaries of Yorkshire, though it spans the ceremonial counties of North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Cumbria."

All ABC members who contribute to Wikipedia are encouraged to add such references to as many UK place name entries as they can.

The Wikipedia policy also states that articles about "counties" should not be split up; they should treat the "counties" as one entity which has changed boundaries with time. This means that the history of Lancashire should, in theory, be found in the same article as that dealing with the current administrative county of that name, the latter being considered to be the former, but having had its boundaries changed! There is probably less cause for concern here since, in reality, it is common practice to have separate articles of the type 'History of Xshire' or 'Xshire (history)'. Such articles inevitably focus principally on the historic county.

Meanwhile, we shall continue to argue within the Wikipedia community that the current policy on Naming Convention (UK counties) needs amending.

People's Place Names (<http://www.yourplacenames.com>)

The notion that general-purpose geography is best entirely divorced from administrative areas is, of course, one of ABC's key contentions. In recent years, the Ordnance Survey has begun to undertake some serious research into this area via its Vernacular Geography project, to which ABC has given occasional advice. As part of this project, Cardiff University has recently launched its People's Place Names survey:

<http://www.yourplacenames.com>

The survey aims to determine the names which people actually use for the places they live, work etc, as opposed to the 'official' administrative names

included on OS maps etc. The historic counties of the UK are, of course, a key part of the way in which people think about place. ABC members are encouraged to take the time to complete the survey for places they live in or are otherwise familiar with, making sure to include the county information. We are trying to impress upon the Ordnance Survey that the historic counties are an important part of the way in which British people think about the geography of our country, and also that every place in the UK lies within an historic county. This survey provides an excellent opportunity to make these points.

Lobbying political parties prior to General Election

The Committee decided that ABC should contact each of the main political parties prior to the general election, outlining ABC's purpose and its main aims as regards legislation, as well as offering our help or advice in formulating policy in any area related to these. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman have subsequently written to the three main parties, though only with the usual polite acknowledgements in response.

Meanwhile, ABC Patron Russell Grant has been expressing his views about counties, local government, identity etc. on TV. These can be seen at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/the_daily_politics/8507864.stm

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/the_daily_politics/8508474.stm

It's entertaining stuff, but inevitably it all gets confused with a lot of talk about local government structure etc. The Secretary of State for Media, Culture and Sport (Ben Bradshaw) was one of the people discussing Russell's ideas with him.

Sadly, however important we consider them, the historic counties aren't likely to form any kind of election issue. ABC's best approach is probably to wait and see who is in power and what direction they take after the election and take it from there.

Yorkshire Dales National Park Extension

Natural England has announced a consultation on planned extensions to the Lake District National Park and the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Details can be found on: <http://www.lakestodaleslandscapes.org.uk/>

This raises a possible issue for ABC since it would involve extending the Yorkshire Dales National Park out of Yorkshire. The majority of the new land pro-

posed to join the Yorkshire Dales NP is in Westmorland, with a small piece of Lancashire.

The committee considers that ABC should not be opposing the expansion of a national park, but we should certainly be considering whether the name "Yorkshire Dales National Park" would continue to be appropriate with the addition of a large area of Westmorland. We have suggested that the name "Yorkshire Dales and Westmorland National Park" would be more appropriate, should the proposed expansion go ahead.

Gazetteer Becomes a Teenager

Now in its fourteenth year, we've recently given the Gazetteer of British Place Names (www.gazetteer.org.uk) a bit of an upgrade, adding more places and taking account the local government changes in 2009. The Gazetteer began way back in 1996 and has become a respected and influential reference source, being used not only by family historians but many in the media as well. Every time I see or hear a place referenced to its proper county, I wonder if it would have been so 13 years ago and whether we have the Gazetteer to thank. Sometimes we certainly do!

Activity continues to grow: these days the site gets over 5,000 "hits" each day. The Good Web Guide: Genealogy which recently described it as "Reliable and rapid, this is the easiest way to look up the location of even the smallest village." The eBook version of the gazetteer has proved a steady seller and a useful source of income for ABC for the last 7 years (sales are still increasing).

The main thing the Gazetteer set out to do though was to promote the notion of the historic counties as a general-purpose geographical reference frame for the UK. By relating each place to its historic county, but also to a variety of types of administrative area, we aimed to spread understanding of the different nature of these entities and the foolishness of seeking to use administrative areas for purposes beyond the narrow purposes they were created for. This is what ABC is all about. The Gazetteer was the first place we put these ideas together in a coherent form, accessible to anyone. In the early 2000s, Britannica revised its own approach to UK geography, basing it largely on the Gazetteer's approach (Wikipedia take note). Royal Mail wanted our data for populating their traditional county data. Most important of all, it is largely on the back of the

Gazetteer that ABC has become a credible voice on UK geography, respected and consulted by bodies such as Royal Mail, Ordnance Survey and Britannica.

Members of ABC entitled to a free eBook. Just email peterboyce@ntlworld.com and I'll let you have the URL where you can download it.

Historic Counties Border Project

The Historic Counties Trust's digitised data for the Welsh counties will shortly be available on the Historic Counties Border Project (www.county-borders.co.uk). Currently the data for England can be obtained in ESRI Shape and Google Earth formats. Ultimately data will be available for the whole of the UK.

A Key Part of Our Cultural Inheritance

The counties are certainly that but, sadly, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport doesn't seem to realise it. It is high time that they had their consciousness raised on this issue, so we wrote to Culture Secretary Ben Bradshaw. He was made aware of the effect the counties have on our tourism, sport, museums & galleries and the protection and promotion of the historic environment.

We have received a reply from Lucy Norris of the Public Engagement and Recognition Unit at DCMS, who writes: **"The Government shares your belief that the diverse culture and heritage of Britain's historic counties is something to celebrate. We understand that Britain's counties each have a unique character and identity, which form the basis of strong regional ties among communities, sports teams and cultural institutions. They underlie the tourist industry and are a key draw for visitors to the UK."** The rest of the letter is really just pointing in the direction of the various QUANGOs which do DCMS's work including, with the implication that they do take due regard of the historic counties, VisitBritain, English Heritage and the Museums and Libraries Archive. All the same, this is something of a minor breakthrough, the Government has previously not really gone beyond a rather unenthusiastic acceptance that the historic counties haven't been abolished. It's useful stuff to quote at English Heritage etc. as follow up. If there is a change of Government, we can follow it up with the new Secretary of State after the election.

News from the Counties

Banffshire Member Alasdair Galloway has written to the BBC in an attempt to have Banffshire mentioned in local weather reports rather than be shuffled into "Aberdeenshire & Moray". An excerpt from his letter reads, *"The Post Office still use Banffshire in their address as most people do including all whisky distilleries in the area, several bodies such as the Banffshire Partnership, and Banffshire Farmers. Together with the enclosures I've included a photo copy of the Association of British Counties booklet, front page and the Government Statement 1974 regarding the traditional boundaries which appears on the front of all their news bulletins and as such is still in force reflecting that both Aberdeenshire and Moray are Unitary Authorities governing parts of the existing Banffshire. Hoping you will now be willing to include our Shire once again in your forecasts and so assist us in retaining our rightful identity."*

Huntingdonshire The flag design submitted by the Huntingdonshire Society has not yet appeared in the published Flag Registry. ABC has been told by Graham Bartram of the Flag Institute that he has been unable to do this and we may have to rethink pursuing any new flags at the moment.

Middlesex The Middlesex Guildhall, designed by James Gibson and finished in 1913, has reopened (1 September 2009) keeping much of its original heritage including the coat of arms above the main entrance. It is now the new home of the Supreme Court.

Oxfordshire The Oxfordshire Association has been successfully launched: a web site has been created (<http://www.oxfordshire-association.org.uk>); and October 19th decided upon and promoted as Oxfordshire Day. A design for an Oxfordshire flag has been agreed, in consultation with the Flag Institute. Many thanks are due to Edward Keene and Michael Garber, the co-founders and driving forces behind the association.

Westmorland A Westmorland association is being set up by Peter Boyce and Dave Russell. ABC has a few members in the county who might be interested in the idea so if you are one of those please get in touch. It is hoped that a county flag can soon be developed and registered with the Flag Institute.

Yorkshire The Yorkshire Ridings Society held its triennial general meeting and re-elected the committee.

Quadhurst's Map of the Historic Counties

Quadhurst Maps have just published this fantastic new map of our counties. The map is on a scale of one inch to 13.5 miles and shows all detached parts that were not affected by the 1844 Act. Also shown are the historic divisions of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, historic county towns, other principal towns and cities, our principal road network and lakes etc.

This is a product ABC has been keen to see available for many years. Quadhurst are to be heartily congratulated. Quadhurst's motivation in this project is that of ABC, to raise awareness of the historic counties. As the map shows: "Our historic counties have never been affected nor their boundaries changed by the endless shifting of local government boundaries over the past 100 years but have remained constant and are today as they have been for centuries."

According to Quadhurst: "A great deal of care and time has gone into this project; and we believe we are correct in saying that it is only one of its type and vital in raising awareness of our historic counties. We are very proud of the result."



Quadhurst have used the first edition OS maps as the basis of the borders, as recommended by the Historic Counties Standard and used in ABC's Gazetteer and the Historic County Trust's Historic County Borders Project. As we did years ago, they have spent a great deal of time in the British Library transcribing the borders to modern mapping!

The map is available as a traditional folded map from Stanfords in London (www.stanfords.co.uk) or direct from Quadhurst (quadhurst@blueyonder.co.uk). A laminated version can also be obtained (direct from Quadhurst only). The only downside is that currently Quadhurst has produced a very limited print run (so get your copy quickly). ABC are, however, in discussions with Quadhurst and would be keen to support a second, larger print run. Based on the number of times we are asked for such a map, we believe there is a sizeable market for it.

Map image courtesy of Quadhurst

The County of Westmorland

Michael Bradford

In February 1833, Thomas Arnold, famous head of Rugby School, had harsh things to say, in a letter to a friend, about Warwickshire and a few other shires. *"I have a craving for the enjoyment of nature,"* he wrote, *"and I only know of five counties in England which cannot supply it – Warwick, Northampton, Huntingdon, Cambridge and Bedford. I am unluckily perched down in one of them. We in Rugby have no hills, no rock, no river, no clear stream, scarcely any flowers – nothing but one endless monotony of inclosed (sic) fields and hedge-row trees."* Only a year later his letters were not about bad luck but good fortune. In his choice of a holiday home he had gone to the other extreme from Rugby. *"Our residence in Westmorland,"* he wrote, *"attaches us to it more and more; the refreshment it affords me is wonderful."* And for the rest of his life, at the start of the school holidays, Arnold and his large family would travel north by railway and horse-drawn carriage to the house, named Fox How, he'd built near Rydal and Ambleside to enjoy what Rugby could not provide: the lakes, the fells, the rocks, the streams, rivers and flowers of what was then, and surely still is, the least spoiled and loveliest of our counties.

For Westmorland has everything – everything desirable in nature, that is. To start with, unlike most counties it has real boundaries. Deep lakes divide it from Lancashire (Windermere) and Cumberland (Ullswater). Fell-walkers tramp its high frontier with Cumberland over the Helvellyn ridge, at 3,000 feet, then cross the Dunmail pass to Bow Fell and Crinkle Crag, and on to Wrynose and the Three Shires Stone, where Lancashire, Cumberland and Westmorland meet. In the north-east, the boundaries with Durham and Yorkshire follow the lofty wall of the north Pennines. Only down the Eden valley and in the south, by Winster and Kirkby Lonsdale, at the border with Lancashire, are there no great physical borders. There is even a brief coastline, where the peaceful village of Arnside fronts the estuary of the Kent on Morecambe Bay. Some of the Lake District's picture-postcard favourites are Westmorland's: the Langdale Pikes, Striding Edge, High Street, where the Romans once marched, and the magnificent head of Ullswater. Yet the county isn't all natural grandeur. Spoil heaps mark the slate-quarrying in Langdale. There is much sheep and cattle farming, with the charm of market towns like Appleby, Kirkby Stephen and Kendal, this last the main centre, where past and present, industry and leisure, are kept in marvellous balance; a great place to live. Nearby is the Lyth valley, where the damsons

grow; and not far away, under the shelter of the hills, stand the gaunt castle ruins of Brough, Brougham, Pendragon and Appleby, this last the home of the redoubtable Lady Anne Clifford, High Sheriff of Westmorland, their restorer in the 17th Century.

Iconic Westmorland: The Langdale Pikes

To go with all this scenic variety, Westmorland has a deep cultural resonance which makes it almost unique among counties. You sense it by following Thomas Arnold and family to the



heart of the mountains, by Grasmere and Rydal Water. Resident here for over fifty years with his wife and sister, William Wordsworth gradually became a national institution through his thoughts on man and nature set in a new kind of poetic language. Like him, the area grew famous, a shrine to be visited, the focus of a fellowship of devotees which still exists. Literary figures came to see the place, and preferably the man as well - Shelley and Keats, Charles Lamb, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Mrs Gaskell and so on. Thomas Arnold enjoyed his walks with his famous neighbour. *"Our friendship with the Wordsworths,"* he wrote, *"was one of the brightest spots of all",* and when the poet died, Arnold's son, Matthew, himself a considerable poet, put into words his own sense of this fellowship and its debt to the man: *"in the shadow Wordsworth lies dead... he was a priest to us all of the wonder and bloom of the world, which we saw with his eyes and were glad".*

But can one still speak of Westmorland, this magical place, in the present tense? In 1974, following a national review of local government, it lost the county council it had had since 1889. Being reviewed, of course, wasn't a new experience for it. Because of its tiny population (just over 70,000 in 1971) Westmorland, like Rutland, had been 'inspected' before. Was it too small to have a county council? Wasn't its rateable income too low for it to run modern services? In the 1960s the answer had been 'no': the government commission had found it healthy. *'Westmorland should not be disturbed'* they decided, otherwise there would be a loss of independence and tradition. The county was *'unlike any other county in England'*, having neither the problems nor the resources which come from

large-scale urbanisation. Then, only 9 short years later, came abolition. No wonder the county council, having heard of the volte-face, gave vent to its irritation by circulating the words of a Roman provincial governor, written in 65AD: *"It seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation."* In 1974 those who cared about Westmorland's special identity must indeed have felt depressed. For though other counties were similarly 'abolished' or mutilated, Westmorland was the most harshly treated. Rutland, like Huntingdonshire, kept its district status and later was even restored to administrative county; and Cumberland, rather than feeling abolished, could see itself as having been enlarged. For 'Cumbria', the new county council's name, is Cumberland's name in Latin, and Cumberland's capital, Carlisle, simply took over an extended domain embracing Westmorland and parts of northern Lancashire and Yorkshire. Only Westmorland, like Middlesex in 1965, was wiped off the administrative map, its sole mention in politics nowadays being in the Westminster constituency 'Westmorland and Lonsdale', a mere travesty of the real county since it only covers the southern part, the old Barony of Kendal.

Arnold Territory: Loughrigg Tarn



Worse still, to add to the injuries inflicted by the Government, there came geographical insults from other quarters. The county's name vanished from Ordnance Survey maps; Royal Mail asked users to put 'Cumbria' instead of Westmorland on envelopes and letterheads; and the new county's name replaced the old one on road signs and in guide-books.

Was this the end, then, not only of a council but of a place? The county had not always existed. Like the rest, it was man-made - in the beginning, no doubt, for purposes of ownership and control. It was a comparative youngster among counties, having first come into being in 1226 through the union of two

Baronies - of Westmorland (Appleby) and Kendal - created by the Normans in 1092. If men had created it perhaps they could abolish it - even after 750 years of life. In the early seventies, when news came of the approaching demise of the County Council, local reactions were confused. Alfred Wainwright, the famous guide-book writer, long resident in Kendal, solemnly and meticulously penned a detailed 'Map of the County of Westmorland as it was on the 31st day of March in the year of Our Lord 1974', adding, with typical wryness, that 'Appleby, the county town, had survived the border raids but not those of Whitehall'. It sounded like a death knell. Presumably he meant there was no place now for Appleby to be capital of. Twenty years ago, however, a former Mayor of the town, Mr Martin Holmes, proudly reminded the present writer that Appleby Parish Council had reacted to 1974 by adopting the name 'Appleby-in-Westmorland' to show that Westmorland was still a place. A well-known writer and lover of the mountains, Harry Griffin, urged that the county's name be preserved, perhaps through a Westmorland Society - recalling the 19th century London-based society of that name which had provided schooling and charity to Westmorland children in the capital before the days of modern local government. Others took comfort in the fact that the 1972 Act had nowhere mentioned abolishing old places: it had only divided the country into new areas for local government. Westmorland had once been such an area and now no longer was. But it had been far more than that. Its was a rich concept evoking images of towns and villages, rivers and streams, dales and mountains, farms and quarries (roofing slates), artists and writers, dialect words and accents, local customs and architectural styles - and so on. For many people it recalled some of the happiest holiday times in their lives; for many others it just meant 'home'.

Today, a glance at the internet is enough to reveal how reluctant people are to lose Westmorland. The website 'Westmorland.org' offers a shared domain name for email addresses. The site, 'Westmorlandinternet.co.uk', comprises people interested in Westmorland, its businesses, clubs and societies. Purveyors of goods apply the county's name to a wide range of items, from windows and conservatories to linen services and furniture. Kendal's major shopping centre bears the county's name, as do the influential Gazette, the local weekly newspaper, and the Westmorland General Hospital. *"Westmorland still lives"*, wrote the secretary of the Westmorland Music Council, *"and when our new concert hall was opened we insisted on calling it 'The Westmorland Hall'"*. Making use of the hall are the Westmorland Orchestra and the Westmorland Youth Orchestra. A Westmorland Music Festival is held every two years and there are Westmorland Football and Cricket leagues. Among the more intriguing groups bearing the name are

the Croquet Club, the Damson Association and the Westmorland Step and Garland Dancers, 'formed in 1976 to learn traditional Westmorland Morris and clog steps in danger of being forgotten' – a group proudly claiming to have represented Great Britain in France and Russia! There are those who even insist on county status, like the Westmorland County Bridge Club and the Westmorland County Agricultural Association which organises each year the County Agricultural Show. For walkers, a delightful modern development is The Westmorland Way, a route traversing the county from north (Appleby) to south (Arnsdale) via Shap, Pooley Bridge, Patterdale, Grasmere, Troutbeck and Kendal.

Despite all this, more could be done on Westmorland's behalf. Alfred Wainwright's map is the last one of the County to appear, with no-one ready yet, it seems, to use ABC's historic county mapping data to produce another. Harry Griffin's wish to see the County's name preserved is certainly being fulfilled but his 'Westmorland Society' has still to be created. If it came about, it could promote the use of the county's name in postal addresses, especially those of hotels, to the benefit of the tourist trade. It might even raise funds for road-signs, as groups elsewhere have done, with 'Historic County of Westmorland' on them, to be placed at the appropriate points on A65 and A66, at the summit of Dunmail Raise and in Langdale, where Westmorland meets Lancashire.

For the Association of British Counties, meanwhile, the defiant words of the aforementioned Lady Anne Clifford, spoken in a different context 400 years ago, stand as an inspiration. She was only 4ft 10ins tall but not even James the First could overawe her. By the early seventeenth century she and her ancestors had been High Sheriffs of the County for four centuries and when the king had the nerve to propose a change her reply was forthright: "I told him that I would never part with Westmorland upon any condition whatsoever".

County Quotes

*"And the sweet grey-gleaming sky
And the lordly strand of Northumberland"*
Algernon Swinburne

"Yea, Sussex by the sea,"
Rudyard Kipling

(Source: *I Never Knew That about England*)

Traversing the Counties

ABC was recently contacted by two young men, Kamal Ahmed and Jack Alexander whom, under the guise of JK Adventures, have undertaken several fascinating expeditions around Britain.

Their first, in 2007, revolved around England when they split the counties into groups of six. They allotted each county a number, rolled a die and then went to the county that was represented by the number that came up. Buoyed by the experience they decided to do another, more expansive, British journey.

They are now embarking on a new adventure, this one built around the traditional 'Land's End-John O'Groats' road trip. They are hoping to stop in every county along the way at a place of interest which will highlight the contrasts between them such as accents, landscapes, cities, attractions, etc. They also are keen to meet local people along the steps of this journey.



As Jack says, they would like to show "why counties are so important and hopefully involve people in the historic and cultural importance of county classification in the UK".

If you have access to a computer you can follow their exploits either on Face-



book under **JK Adventures** or watch videos of their travels on YouTube under the username **Omnislash 2000**. Please log on to one of these sites and give them your support as they are doing a great job of supporting our traditional counties. You can also suggest itineraries for them to undertake.

The Counties as Recorded in the Domesday Book

Mari Foster

Twenty years after the Norman invasion William the Conqueror sought to undertake a survey of all his English holdings. The cynical might imagine that this was merely for tax collection purposes, money to fill the king's coffers and advance his interests elsewhere. This is mostly true but the king, under constant threat from invasion himself by the Danes and Norwegians also needed a definitive assessment of his military backing. England's population was around 2.5 million (with perhaps only 5% of this Norman) making some sort of survey essential.

This endeavour, done in seven circuits, was accomplished in less than two years and much of this is owed to the highly developed administrative system already established by the Anglo-Saxons; that is, the counties. The holdings were organised by the established counties then further divided into landholders, hundreds and manors. According to Robert, Bishop of Hereford, the kings men

"...made a survey of all England; of the lands in each of the counties; of the possessions of each of the magnates, their lands, their inhabitants, their men, both bond and free, living in huts or with their own house or land; of ploughs, horses and other animals; of the services and payments due from each and every estate.

After these investigators came others who were sent to unfamiliar counties to check the first description and to denounce any wrong-doers to the king. And the land was troubled with many calamities arising from the gathering of the royal taxes."

Amazingly, we know exactly what questions the king's surveyors asked. We get this information from the Ely Inquest which was part of the larger appraisal.

"...They inquired what the manor was called; who held it at the time of King Edward; who holds it now; how many hides there are; how many ploughs in the demesne (held by the lord) and how many belonging to the men; how many villagers; how many cottagers; how many slaves; how many freemen; how many sokemen [similar to freemen]; how much woodland; how much meadow; how much pasture; how many mills; how many fisheries; how much had been added to or taken away from the estate; what it used to be worth altogether; what it is worth now; and how

much each freeman and sokeman had and has.

All this was to be recorded thrice, namely as it was in the time of King Edward, as it was when King William gave it and as it is now. And it was also to be noted whether more could be taken than is now being taken."

A typical entry, this one for Brailes, the largest holding in Warwickshire, read:

The King holds BRAILES. Earl Edwin held it [under Edward]. 46 hides. Land for 60 ploughs. In lordship 6; 12 male and 3 female slaves; 100 villagers and 30 smallholders with 46 ploughs. A mill at 10s; meadow, 100 acres; woodland 3 leagues long and 2 leagues wide. Before 1066 it paid £17 10s; value now £55 and 20 packloads of salt.

Strangely, some of England's most important cities like London and Winchester were not assessed. Neither were any of the northern border counties. Many Welsh entries have been included into the western border counties. But from this survey can be seen the diversity of the counties in the 11th century. I would like to examine some of the more interesting entries by looking at a cross-section of counties.

In 1066 Huntingdonshire was divided into four equally sized hundreds. The most prominent monastic house was Ramsey Abbey whose abbot was one of the country's largest landholders. Part of the county's land had already been claimed as William I's royal forest but by the reign of Henry II (1154-1189) the entire county was a private hunting reserve. Huntingdonshire was of great strategic value to the Normans as the Roman road, Ermine Street, intersected the River Ouse at Huntingdon and William I had a castle built to defend this spot. The village of Kimbolton makes for an interesting entry as it was the only manor in the county held by King Harold and had increased in value since 1066. A prosperous village 500 strong, Kimbolton's main road was diverted through the town in an attempt to force travellers to pay a toll in order to continue their journey. This may seem odd to our modern psyche since most people nowadays would prefer to see a bypass around their village rather than through it.

Kent is unique in its use of the sulung, a division of land whose area was around twice that of a hide and the equivalent of four yokes. The hundreds were grouped into seven lathes and were the basis of local government until 1974.

Although landing in Sussex, after Hastings William the Conqueror headed straight for its eastern neighbour. He allotted more than a third of the land to his brother Odo whom he made Earl of Kent. Two of the other holdings provided a defence of London from the coast at Tonbridge and the Romney Marshes. Dover, burned down after the invasion, could not be fairly assessed. Interestingly, we learn that fines for adultery by men were paid to the king (in nearly all parts of the county) with women's adultery fines being paid to the Archbishop. The King also acquired half the belongings of a person condemned to death.

Leicestershire belonged to the northern Danelaw and was thus measured in carucates & wapentakes although there are some indications that it was not entirely Danish. With the exception of forest in the west, Leicestershire was one of the more densely populated counties in the 11th century. However, its holdings were more lowly valued which suggests that the county was devastated by the king during uprisings following the Conquest. The sheriff of Leicestershire, Hugh de Grandmesnil, held a large amount of land including 180 houses and four churches. Another interesting landholder was Countess (Lady) Godiva of the infamous horse ride through Coventry who had three holdings.

The survey for Berkshire is more detailed than for other counties and tells much about the customs and daily life of the people there. Both the king and the Abbey of Abingdon had 47 holdings although the abbey did not hold Abingdon itself and the town did not have its own entry. The largest town of the time was Wallingford which had around 500 buildings more than half of which were owned by the king. It, along with Reading, were the only two named boroughs for the county.

One of the county's main industries was dairy farming much as it is today, but it also was responsible for producing such diverse food commodities as fish and grain. Goosey, held by the abbey, was one of these dairy producing villages and its cheeses were much valued by the abbot. The village's two dairies supplied them with 7,000 pounds of cheese a year.

Like Berkshire, Cheshire has today the same industry as in the Middle Ages, in this case, salt mining. Then, Cheshire's land was fairly evenly divided between the Bishop of Chester and the Earl of Chester. However, the east of the county had been laid waste by warfare, noted as "Wasta est" in Domesday. Also, the term "Wastam invenit" meaning "found waste" suggests that there had been possible raiding by the Welsh before the conquest which had rendered much of

the county uninhabitable. Beyond this, Chester was the major town although it too had many vacant buildings. Boundary changes were common between Cheshire and Wales with many (now) Welsh towns being included in the county's assessment. There were upwards of 80 of these holdings.

Cheshire

In Herefordshire it is interesting to note that Normans were settled in the county before 1066. After this date William FitzOsbern (Earl of Hereford) was responsible for securing the western frontier against Welsh invasion, building and re-building fortresses along the border. Like Cheshire, some parts were predominantly Welsh but there were also English settlements west of Offa's Dyke. Leominster Priory held huge swathes of agricultural land and Hereford was the only town of any substantial size but nothing was safe from marauding Welsh tribes.

We know about Cambridgeshire from not only Domesday but also from two other manuscripts: *Inquisitio Eliensis* and *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, both written at around the same time. The former holds information about all of Ely Abbey's holdings in several counties as well as their land in Cambridgeshire which stood at around one-fifth of its total area. The other book describes in greater detail the holdings in the county.

One third of the county was fenland and thus uninhabitable. Much of the remaining land was used for agriculture. As the great university had not yet been established Cambridge, despite a population of 2,000, was considered somewhat primitive.

One-third of Dorset's land was held by the church but then, as now, it was an agricultural county with many small villages. Some of the land may have been used for hunting as about half of the county was either forest or wasteland. Dorset was divided into 39 hundreds and contained many small hamlets, most with only a handful of inhabitants. There were plenty of settlements along rivers and this is seen in the names of places using suffixes such as 'bourne' (stream) as in Winterbourne or Wimbourne although there were many of these sorts of



names making them indistinguishable from one another. Even though Dorset was to a greater extent agricultural, it boasted a flourishing fisheries industry and the port of Wareham was the busiest in the country.

Dorset



Middlesex, which was bordered by the rivers Thames, Lea and Colne to the south, east and west respectively and by woodland to the north, was much less populated in relation to other counties than it is today. Two pages of the survey were left blank, presumably for London's statistics, but these were never taken. However, Middlesex's class structure is more finely covered than in any other county. From this we can see that half the population were *villani* (it's generally accepted that this means villager) with a hide of land each. Next came the *bordarii* (smallholders) with around 1/2 hide each. Beneath them were the *cottari* (cottagers) with approximately 5 acres each, give or take, and finally, at the bottom of the heap, landless slaves. Also included in this structure were French "*milites*" which can loosely be translated as "knight" or "man-at-arms" although these men were more like sword-for-hire than the type of knight we would recognise today.

Three East Anglian counties, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex formed what was called the Little Domesday Book and was done as a separate circuit of the survey. This was merely a reflection of the tome's size and not its content as it was a greatly detailed account of the three counties. It was not added to Great Domesday perhaps because William died before it could be collated with the rest of the survey. One thing that distinguishes Little Domesday from Great Domesday is its rigorous reckoning of livestock. Suffolk was recorded as having 4,343 goats but only two donkeys.

Suffolk had 24 hundreds which were divided into leets but it is not certain from where this originates although it had something to do with the apportioning of tax. Some manors held annual courts called a court-leet so perhaps the word is associated with that. Mostly villages of freemen, Suffolk had very few manors

and feudal vassals. One of the most interesting entries is for Dunwich which lies along the coast. The entry mentions that it was held by one Robert Malet and measured "*then 2 carucates of land, now 1, the sea carried off the other*". The town had a prosperous fishing industry despite its crumbling coastline. It paid an annual gift to the king of 68,000 herrings, more than any other town in the county.

So from this cross-section of entries we can see how vital the Domesday Book was to our understanding of how the administration of the counties was done. Not only a valuable tool for modern historians, the Domesday Book was used in courts to determine a person's status or the land holdings of the aristocracy for over a century after its composition. But it is also useful now to back up our claims of the importance of our traditional counties and their social and historic value.

Surveyors' circuits: **Circuit 1:** Berkshire, Hampshire, Kent, Surrey, Sussex; **Circuit 2:** Cornwall, Devonshire, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire; **Circuit 3:** Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex; **Circuit 4:** Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire; **Circuit 5:** Cheshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire; **Circuit 6:** Derbyshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Yorkshire; **Little Domesday:** Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk.

Glossary of terms:

CARUCATE: equivalent to a hide under Danelaw, from Latin *caruca*-plough
 FURLONG: 220 yards; one-sixteenth of a hide; 1/4 or a virgate
 HIDE: 60-120 acres, enough to support a family
 HOLDING (or FIEF): manors held by single tenant-in-chief in a county
 HUNDRED: division of county which had its own court
 SULUNG: about twice the area of a hide; from Old English *sulh*-plough
 VIRGATE: 1/4 of a hide
 WAPENTAKE: equivalent to a hundred under Danelaw
 YOKE: land that a pair of oxen could plough; 1/4 of a sulung

Bibliography

Hinde, Thomas *The Domesday Book: Then and Now* Crescent Publishing, 1995.
 Wood, Michael *Domesday* BBC Books, 1986.
 The Domesday Book Online, www.domesdaybook.co.uk

A View of Oxfordshire

Edward Keene

Everyone has heard of Oxford.

Oxfordshire passed them by.

This is the eternal truism that we of Oxfordshire-without-Oxford live with. It is both boon and detriment when responding to the question, posed royally perhaps, of "and where have you come from?". Connection and concealment.

Instant recognition is afforded by the intonation of the county town - be it to friend or foreigner. Equally automated audio-mental pasting applied to the flaccid, forlorn, suffix; '-shire'.

"No, actually I don't live anywhere near Oxford."

Stunned, uncomprehending silence

"But I thought you said..."

In one ear and out the other. The experience is understandable though, both due to the fame of the university town and the heterogeneity of the county.

Our whole nation carries with it, in the handbag of culture, the myth of the ancient universities. The association is intensified in the counties that carry their name to a point of abject subservience to the academic. In this respect, not only the county outside the town, but also the city outside the cloister loses part of itself, of its particularity, to the monolithic *idea* of that which lies within. Oxford University - undoubtedly among the greatest, grandest, and oldest in the world - has rightly won this height of acclaim. From its murky post-conquest ecclesiastical origins, through long centuries of change and evolution, it has grown to be a global institution of 20,000 students well on its way to a billion pound annual turnover. Any recitation of the great names or buildings or events of Oxfordshire 'in toto' inevitably consist largely of those revolving around the university. Histories and perspectives of 'Oxford', both real and imagined, are plenteous and well known. I will not then dwell on it further.

It is well reported that Oxfordshire outside Oxford is dull. This, as you may imagine I would say, is not the case. It is true though that the county requires some patience. It does not provide many instant thrills as others do, but rather

rewards long and growing familiarity. A summary of the orthodox essentials can be found in Russell Grant's staple 'The Real Counties of Britain', though on his opening thesis that it is a 'very together county', I must disagree. In fact, for a place of its comparatively diminutive size (one of the smallest historic counties - purists will know the precise ranking) it contains a profound diversity of landscape and composition. To the west are the Oxon Cotswolds, their capital the golden tourist mecca of Burford. To the east, the lesser known, yet less remote Chilterns lay half their bulk in Oxfordshire. To the north is the Ironstone-built midlands-facing territory of 'Banburyshire', a colloquial sub-county around Oxfordshire's second town. To the south is the commuter pale from Caversham to Henley-on-Thames; that town to some a home, to others just a date in the social calendar of high society. In the midst of it all, the Vale of Oxford, field, and forest, and fen, in the centre whereof, cradled gently by the twin rises of Bullingdon and Wytham, the humming county town, arrayed about that antique nucleus of spires, domes, dazzling quads, and hallowed halls.

Such diversity one might think would ensure renown. Yet instead, the disparity of the elements and the highly irregular, elongated disposition of the geography serve to find Oxfordshire's parts pulling in separate directions and appended in the common mind to neighbouring shires and districts. Banbury and the north have long been suppliers of the Birmingham metropolis, both in manpower and materials. Caversham and Stokenchurch, beyond the 'mountainous impasse' of the Chilterns are administered by Berks and Bucks CCs - Henley was at once threatened with a similar fate. Thanks to our narrow strip of Cotswolds (mostly in Gloucestershire) there is no 'Oxfordshire Life' now, but only a 'Cotswold Life'. Many major sites of the county seem strangely drawn to its extreme edge - Chastleton House, Stonor Park, the Rollright Stones, Fairmile Boulevard. Even the City of Oxford herself, precariously across the river from Berkshire, now finds several of her suburbs and a large minority of her working population in that transfluvial royal province. It is this last association that finds the modern Oxfordshire County Council administering a good third of Berkshire including her county town of Abingdon and leads the inhabitants of Didcot, Wantage, Wallingford and surrounding villages to the ahistoric conviction that Berkshire is now nothing to do with them. Herein lies a challenge for the newly formed Oxfordshire Association - to affirm our true county, upheld so gracefully and curvaceously by old Father Thames.

As stated, the overlooking of Oxfordshire can bring benefits as well as misunderstanding. It is most pleasurable to have some of the rarer joys a slightly

private matter. Yet for the nobility of the fellowship of the ABC I am delighted to share a few with the readership.

The market towns of Thame and Witney stand to either hand of Oxford, both about 12 miles from the city, the former east, the latter west. Both boast wide high streets, splendid town halls, and magnificently glorious civic churches (always the top three things I search out in an English settlement). Unlike Oxford herself, parking here is easy, shops small, friendly, and independent, and students...non-existent. Banbury and Bicester meanwhile are more 'developed' towns - a little too urban to be twee. Bicester is still on track to become an 'eco-town' - a development which will see it rival Banbury as second town of the county. Development has its own charms. The medium and heavy industries of Banbury complement those in East Oxford to challenge a possible stereotype of Oxfordshire as a wholly rural/agricultural demesne. Its layout, built environment, and nomenclature (viz. the delightful 'Grimsbury') evoke in some ways a northern ambience of sterner stuff.

Lesser towns are also a delight. Watlington and Chinnor both sit at the foot of the abrupt Chiltern escarpment (so moulded ten millennia ago as the southernmost buffer of the ice age glaciers). They lie either side of the M40's dramatic easterly approach into the county through the Chiltern Cutting - a vast excavation of the chalky ridge described by the late member for Henley as Oxfordshire's 'Khyber Pass'. Unlike its namesake in Pakistan, traffic is unlikely to be harassed by itinerant Pashtuns, though may be arrested by the sweeping views of Oxfordshire laid out below - a sight very beautiful to the eye of any native of this country. A less fleeting view of the same is afforded by a stationary position held on the heights above the aforementioned towns, though sadly many otherwise superb vistas are blocked by often dense beech woods. Just as Watlington stands aside one wonder of Oxfordshire, so the estate town of Woodstock does by another - the Palace of Blenheim, no less. Part stately home of the Dukes of Marlborough, part national monument commemorating victories in the War of the Spanish Succession, the palace is one of three in the county (alongside Cuddesdon (ecclesiastical) and Beaumont (royal)), though the only one extant. As 'the other' World Heritage Site in the county, Blenheim is also very much on the tourist trail, though the log-jam queues at the gates are easily avoided by strolling into the park on foot via one of the gates or ladders found at the wall. Seen from across the restrained lakes of the dammed Glyme, the sight of the palace is, like the university, an insight to the stuff of England's soul. Carterton in the south west of Oxfordshire is out of the way and distinctly a military town -

overtures of Catterick - and has a little echo of itself over in Benson. Both serve significant RAF bases. Chipping Norton in the northwest is another Cotswold stunner.

Village-wise, the variety goes on, from deserted medieval (Willaston, Tusmore, Thomley) to hulking Kidlington (pop. 17,000) resplendent in its self-denial of town hood. In between is found Dorchester, the ancient Episcopal see of Mercia and Wessex, abandoned by Normans in favour of Lincoln, leaving Oxfordshire un-bishoped for almost five centuries until a Henrician one arrived in Osney (a western suburb of Oxford). The only other significant vestige of Rome is at Alchester, on Watling Street which bisects the county. Adjacent Bicester sounds hopeful, but lacks true antiquity. Much of early Oxfordshire was heavily wooded, not least by the royal forest of Wychwood, now reduced to a shadow of its former self, yet with the aftertaste of past glory. Wheatley in the east, on the old London Road was a quarrying place, producing much of the stone for the foundations of Oxford, as well as for its own great Street-designed church steeple which hails the approach to Oxford on the A40. On steeples, the highest in the county is found at St Mary, Bloxham (198 feet), near Banbury. Bodicote, Deddington, Adderbury, and Hook Norton join with Bloxham to form a group of large north Oxfordshire villages whose character defines the area. Sturdy, orange, and assured. Yet certainly the very small villages and hamlets play their part too - Godington (down a lane, almost in Northamptonshire), Binsey (retreat of the patron saint, Frideswide), Denton (a perfect manor estate), Goring (and its Gap), Dean (so hidden it is said to be mythical; home to a would-be Prime Minister), and Ewelme to name but a few.

Politically, Oxfordshire is true blue Conservative, with the major exception of the city of Oxford where a liberal intelligentsia in the centre, west, and north combines with the historic working-class east to make for a radical city council where no Conservative has been elected in almost a decade. It is one of the few lower councils in the country whose members meet 'Westminster style' facing one another rather than in the more popular and conciliar semi-circular arrangement. The growing 'beltway culture' around outer Oxford has brought Oxford politics to the surrounds but the Liberal Democrat main opposition still has a steep hill to climb to take the county. The county council meets at County Hall - a particularly unpleasant castle-pastiche ironically sited next to the real Oxford Castle (itself now a four-star hotel following conversion from a prison).

It is difficult not to end where one began. For in Oxfordshire, all roads do indeed

lead to Oxford (except the M40, which very rudely bypasses it, taking the northerly route past the wilderness of Ot Moor). For the historian, Oxford really is too good to be true. There are so many layers of life, and so much of it still visible, undeveloped, un-bombed, unspoilt. Always something new to be found, always something exciting to be discovered. The city is large enough to command the county with authority, yet small enough, familiar, and settled enough that one may meet half a dozen old acquaintances on a typical walk down the High Street on a cloudless Saturday afternoon in high summer. It is said that there is nowhere finer in the world to be educated or to be ill. For the university is complemented by many great schools and itself supports the multitude of teaching hospitals, the greatest being the immaculate white hulk of the John Radcliffe which looms over the city from its roost on Headington Hill.

Oxford at its romantic best is summed up by Evelyn Waugh's opening scene in Brideshead Revisited of the people going to and fro all on a Sunday morning to the various 'temples of their nation'. For me, the soul of Oxfordshire is not in the vaunted seat of learning, or in the great highways, or in the places of temporal power, or in the occasional passing entertainments and events, but in the clay-soil fields and in those scattered temples, civic and rural, which have been witness to, and bear record of, the lives of twenty, thirty, forty generations of Oxfordshire folk - all of them quite certain until this last of who they were and where they were from.

County Websites

Affiliate organisations

Huntingdonshire Society: <http://www.rhbarnes.demon.co.uk/hunts>

Oxfordshire Association: <http://oxfordshire.mfgarber.com>

Friends of Real Lancashire: <http://www.forl.co.uk>

Yorkshire Ridings Society: <http://www.yorkshireridings.com>

Saddleworth White Rose Society: <http://whiterose.saddleworth.net>

If you would like a society included, please contact the editor.

County Calendar

Huntingdonshire Day: 25 April

Middlesex Day: 16 May

Somerset Day: 17 June

County Quiz: Identify the County Town



- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- E. _____
- F. _____
- G. _____
- H. _____
- I. _____
- J. _____
- K. _____
- L. _____

County Books

A Sussex Miscellany-Sophie Collins, Snake River Press, 2007

Wales After 1536-a Guide-Donald Gregory, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 1995

Radnorshire: a Historical Guide-Donald Gregory, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 1994

Ayrshire: a Historical Guide-Thorbjørn Campbell, Birlinn Limited, 2003

I Never Knew That About Britain: the Quiz Book-Christopher Winn,

Ebury Press, 2009

Shropshire-Ellis Peters, Sutton Publishing, 1992

Great Houses of Scotland-Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd/Christopher Simon

Sykes, Silverdale Books, 2005

Schoolchildren told to avoid Wikipedia

Ofqual (regulator of qualifications, exams & tests in England) encourages children to put keywords into internet search engines and says it is a "good starting point" when researching pieces of coursework and dissertations. But guidance sent out to schoolchildren in England warns pupils to be extremely wary when using websites such as Wikipedia. Children should aim, rather, to use Google and Yahoo to improve their essays, according to the official exams watchdog. The on-line encyclopaedia – created using contributions from readers – was not "authoritative or accurate" and in some cases "may be completely untrue", said Ofqual.

ABC and its affiliate organisations have had a long-standing disagreement with Wikipedia over its misuse of traditional counties and its obstinacy over this issue. See also pg.7.

(From a report in the Telegraph newspaper, 6th January 2009)

Source: Chris Dawson, Friends of Real Lancashire

Quiz Answers

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A. Wick, Caithness | G. Presteigne, Radnorshire |
| B. Elgin, Morayshire | H. Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire |
| C. Haddington, East Lothian | I. Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire |
| D. Appleby, Westmorland | J. Chelmsford, Essex |
| E. Derby, Derbyshire | K. Exeter, Devon |
| F. Shrewsbury, Shropshire | L. Lewes, Sussex |